

Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior listings of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims

1. (Currently Amended) An image processing system for producing clusters of related objects within ~~as~~ an image for subsequent analysis, said system including:

means for supplying a multi-level digital representation of an image;

means for identifying predetermined objects in the image from the multi-level digital representation of the image and supplying data defining the locations of the objects;

means for deriving boundary data from the multi-level digital representation of the image, the boundary data representing boundaries between regions of the image having different characteristics;

means for clustering the predetermined objects into groups of related objects as a function of the proximity of the objects to each other and as a function of the boundary data; and

means for supplying data relating to the groups of objects for subsequent analysis.

2.-8. (Cancelled).

9. (Previously Presented) A method for processing images for producing clusters of related objects within an image for subsequent analysis, said method including the steps of:

supplying a multi-level digital representation of an image;

identifying predetermined objects in the image and supplying data defining the locations of the predetermined objects based on the multi-level digital representation of the image;

deriving boundary data from the multi-level digital representation of the image, the boundary data representing boundaries between regions of the original image having different characteristics; and

clustering the predetermined objects into groups of related objects as a function of the proximity of the objects to each other and as a function of the boundary data.

10.-16. (Cancelled).

17. (Previously Presented) The image processing system of Claim 1, wherein said means for deriving boundary data derives boundary data based on a representation of the image that is different from the representation of the image from which said means for identifying predetermined objects identifies objects and defines the locations of objects in the image.

18. (Previously Presented) The image processing system of Claim 1, wherein said means for deriving boundary data derives boundary data from a source of data containing data representing the image that is different from the source of data containing data representing the image from which said means for identifying predetermined objects identifies objects and defines the locations of objects in the image.

19. (Previously Presented) The image processing system of Claim 1, wherein:

said means for supplying the multi-level digital representation of the image generates background data representative of the background of the image; and

said means for identifying boundary data derives boundary data from the background data generated by said means for generating the multi-level digital representation of the image.

20. (Previously Presented) The image processing system of Claim 19, wherein said means for identifying boundary data is configured to derive boundary data from background data that are color data.

21. (Previously Presented) The image processing system of Claim 19, wherein said means for identifying boundary data is configured to derive boundary data from background data that are greyscale data.

22. (Previously Presented) The image processing system of Claim 1, wherein said means for clustering objects clusters objects together that are separated by less than a predetermined distance.

23. (Previously Presented) The image processing system of Claim 1, wherein said means for clustering objects clusters objects together that are separated by less than a predetermined distance and that are not separated by a boundary defined by the boundary data.

24. (Previously Presented) The image processing system of Claim 1, wherein said means for clustering objects clusters objects together that are not separated by a boundary defined by the boundary data.

25. (Previously Presented) The method of processing an image of Claim 9, wherein, in said step of deriving boundary data, the representation of the image from which the boundary

data is derived is different from the representation of the image from which, in said step of identifying and locating the predetermined objects, the predetermined objects are identified and located.

26. (Previously Presented) The method of processing an image of Claim 9, wherein, in said step of deriving boundary data, the source of data from which the boundary data is derived is different from the source of data from which, in said step of identifying and locating the predetermined objects, the predetermined objects are identified and located.

27. (Previously Presented) The method of processing an image of Claim 9, wherein:

in said step of supplying the multi-level representation of the image, background data of the image are supplied; and

in said step of deriving boundary data, the source of data from which the boundary data is derived is the background data.

28. (Previously Presented) The method of processing an image of Claim 27, wherein, in said step of supplying the multi-level representation of the image the background data that are supplied are color data.

29. (Previously Presented) The method of processing an image of Claim 27, wherein, in said step of supplying the multi-level representation of the image the background data that are supplied are greyscale data.

30. (Previously Presented) The method of processing an image of Claim 9, wherein, in said step of clustering the predetermined objects into groups, objects are clustered

together that are separated by less than a predetermined distance.

31. (Previously Presented) The method of processing an image of Claim 9, wherein, in said step of clustering the predetermined objects into groups, objects are clustered together that are separated by less than a predetermined distance and that are not separated by a boundary defined by the boundary data.

32. (Currently Amended) The method of processing an image of ~~Claim 32~~Claim 9, wherein, in said step of supplying a multi-level digital representation of the image, an image of a piece of mail is supplied.

33. (Previously Presented) The method of processing an image of Claim 9, wherein, in said step of clustering the predetermined objects into groups, objects are clustered together that are not separated by a boundary defined by the boundary data.

34. (Previously Presented) The method of processing an image of Claim 9, wherein, in said step of supplying a multi-level digital representation of the image, an image of a piece of mail is supplied.